



Connecting spiral dynamic theory to the study of civic engagement in for-profit higher education

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Summary

The civic engagement commitment and mission among the growing number of for-profit higher education enterprises remains empirically unexplored. This session proposes the use of Spiral Dynamic Theory (SDT) as a theoretical framework to examine levels of civic engagement in complex contexts associated with private, for-profit, graduate-level education. We will explain SDT and propose a research study to examine how adult civic engagement and bidirectional reciprocity occur between for-profit institutions of higher education and the communities in which they operate.

Spiral dynamic theory and its application to the study of educational engagement in for-profit higher education hold great promise. The strength of SDT for this research is that it provides a framework for contextual analysis of levels of civic engagement, which is particularly useful given the complexities

(Beck & Cowan, 1996) of the macro environment of for-profit entrepreneurial education. It also provides for concomitant micro-level analysis to assist in identifying those 'MEMEs (or worldview systems) which are operating among adults that may be associated with low or high levels of civic engagement.

The theory's limitation is that it is not an individual personality assessment that seeks to categorize people but rather a description of how the world is viewed through a particular capacity to respond to increasing levels of life complexity. Its application in an engagement study provides a way to think about how groups of people prioritize their existence and are civically engaged commensurate with those priorities. SDT deals almost exclusively with worldviews and deep cultural value systems (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005). Therefore, measuring levels of civic engagement based upon these ontologies in association with private for-profit contexts has significant implications for both adult education theory and practice.

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